

Georgia Department of Human Resources

CHILDREN 1ST

Children 1st is a program that works to ensure a healthy start for Georgia's most vulnerable children from birth until they are five years old. During these early years, at-risk children can benefit greatly and develop to their fullest potential by receiving comprehensive preventive health care, specialized care when necessary, and many other associated services.

The Children 1st system is designed to help families of at-risk children get needed assistance and extra support in meeting the challenges of parenthood. Parents whose infants and children are at risk for poor health outcomes are linked to prevention based programs and services, such as child care and parent education classes. The Children 1st program is a statewide collaboration coordinated by the Georgia Department of Human Resources Division of Public Health, Family Health Branch. Participation is voluntary and at no cost to families.

Identifying children at risk

About 40 percent of Georgia's children each year are born with medical conditions or live in circumstances that can cause health or developmental difficulties. Children 1st seeks to reach all Georgia families with newborns to identify those children and families who might need assistance. The Children 1st screening, assessment and referral process gives all of Georgia's children an opportunity for healthy development.

During FY 2002, Children 1st identified over 41,000 newborns and children needing medical or developmental services. Referral sources include doctors, nurses, hospitals or various community providers and caretakers. Of those children identified, over 16,000 children were linked to primary health care providers for continued assistance. Over 48,000 children were monitored last year for health and developmental status.

Connecting children and families to services

When Children 1st identifies an eligible child, a public health nurse or other qualified professional contacts the child's family. The family is offered a home visit to identify strengths and needs. Once needs are assessed, families are linked to programs and services including health coverage and a primary health care provider, as necessary. With parent consent, Children 1st stays in contact with the child's primary health care provider until the child's fifth birthday to confirm that the child is receiving regular check-ups and other necessary medical services.

Community partners

The Children 1st program is provided through Georgia's 19 public health district offices, assisted by state staff in the Division of Public Health. Children 1st works in partnership with hospitals, physicians, public and private clinics, social service agencies, other child service providers and parents. Children 1st also collaborates with the Georgia chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; Healthy Families; and the Family Connection Partnership to ensure healthy development of newborns and young children.

Children 1st at work

“I am a 42-year-old mother of three boys. My 4-month-old twins were born premature. Early in my pregnancy I was fighting a battle with breast cancer. A nurse with the health department called me and talked to me about Children 1st. During a visit to my home she told me about services my family could receive. She was very professional and gave me information to help me take care of my family and myself. Without this service I would be still struggling.” The Children 1st nurse linked this mother to the Women’s Health Cancer program, the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program, and Medicaid for her premature twins and herself. She followed up with the mother several times to make sure she was receiving the help she needed to get well. (Dougherty County)

Additional information

For more information about Children 1st see the Georgia Department of Human Resources publication *Children 1st Moving Ahead, the Role of Children 1st in Improving Child Health in Georgia*. (<http://health.state.ga.us/programs/childrenfirst/pdfs/children.pdf>)

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